



[Home](#) > [Methodologies](#) > [Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation, Australia methodology](#) > December 2024

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Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation, Australia methodology

Reference period December 2024

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On this page

- [Introduction](#)
- [Scope and coverage](#)
- [Collection method](#)
- [Weighting and estimation](#)
- [Comparability with LFS](#)
- [Survey output](#)
- [Conceptual framework](#)
- [What is a barrier?](#)
- [Data quality](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Related publications](#)
- [History of changes](#)

Introduction

The Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation (B&I) Survey was first conducted during the 2004-05 financial year, as a topic on the Multipurpose Household Survey (MPHS). The MPHS is conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as a supplement to the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS) and is designed to collect statistics for a number of small, self-contained topics.

The Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation survey was initially collected every second financial year from 2004-05 to 2022-23. The survey is now collected every year (with annual and quarterly outputs). It provides a range of information about people who are not working or not fully employed, and the factors that may influence them to work.

Descriptions of the underlying concepts and structure of Australia's labour force statistics, and the sources and methods used in compiling the estimates, are presented in [Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/labour-statistics-concepts-sources-and-methods/latest-release\)](#).

Scope and coverage

The scope of the LFS is the civilian population aged 15 years and over, excluding:

- Members of the permanent defence forces.
- Certain diplomatic personnel of overseas governments.
- Overseas residents in Australia.
- Members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependants) stationed in Australia.

The following additional exclusions apply:

- People aged 15-17 years.
- Very remote parts of Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- People living in non-private households such as hotels, university residences, students at boarding schools, patients in hospitals, inmates of prisons and residents of other institutions (e.g. retirement homes, homes for people with disabilities).

In the LFS, coverage rules are applied, which aim to ensure that each person is associated with only one dwelling, and hence has only one chance of selection in the survey. See [Labour Force, Australia, Methodology \(/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/jun-2023\)](#) for more details.

Collection method

The Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation topic is collected within the Multi-Purpose Household Survey (MPHS), a supplement to the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Each month, a sample of households are selected for the MPHS from the responding households who are in the last of their 8 months in the LFS. In these households, after the LFS had been fully completed for each person, a usual resident aged 18 years and over is selected at random to complete the questionnaire. Data are collected via personal interviews by either telephone or in person at selected households.

For more details, see the MPHS chapter in [Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/labour-statistics-concepts-sources-and-methods/latest-release\)](#).

Questionnaire

[Download XLSX](#)
[380.87 KB]

Sample Design

This survey is based on the new sample introduced into LFS in July 2018. The new sample design has adopted the use of the Address Register as the sampling frame for unit selection, and the sampling fractions for selection probabilities within each state have been updated to reflect the most recent population distribution based on results from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing. As with each regular sample design, the impacts on the data are expected to be minimal. For more information, see the [Information Paper: Labour Force Survey Sample Design \(/statistics/research/labour-force-survey-sample-design\)](#).

Sample Size

The sample is pooled from data collected each month across the whole financial year. In January 2023, the ABS increased the sample selections for the remaining 6 months of the year. The total sample size of the 2023-24 B&I survey (after taking into account the scope, coverage and sub-sampling exclusions) was approximately 24,000. The sample size for the December 2024 quarter was approximately 6,000.

Weighting and estimation

Population benchmarks

Survey weights are calibrated against population benchmarks to ensure that the survey estimates conform to the independently estimated distribution of the population, rather than the distribution within the sample itself.

When calibrating the weights, the survey sample is grouped into categories based on the following characteristics:

- State or territory
- Capital city or rest of state
- Sex
- Age
- Employed full-time, part-time, unemployed or not in the labour force

The Labour Force Survey estimates are calculated in such a way as to sum to the independent estimates of the civilian population aged 15 years and over (population benchmarks). These population benchmarks are updated quarterly based on Estimated Resident Population (ERP) data. See [Labour Force, Australia, Methodology \(/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/jun-2023\)](#) for more information.

From August 2015, Labour Force estimates have been compiled using population benchmarks based on the most recently available release of ERP data, continually revised on a quarterly basis.

The B&I benchmarks were based on a 12-month average of the LFS estimates for the June to July financial year, from the November 2023 LFS. This approach is used to remove the seasonality from the employed, unemployed and not in the labour force benchmarks and to improve coherence between the two publications.

Estimates from previous surveys back to 2014-15 have also been revised using this method, with benchmarks based on the same population series (as at November 2023). These estimates were calibrated to population benchmarks based on the final rebasing of ERP that incorporated the results of the 2021 Census (introduced to LFS in the November 2023 issue).

Quarterly benchmarks

The benchmarks for quarterly estimation were based on the same method as for the full financial year sample, using the corresponding 3-month average of the LFS estimates for each quarter. This shorter time period does not account for seasonality in the same way as using a 12-month average, so it is expected that some seasonality remains in the estimates.

The weights for the reduced quarterly sample were calibrated based on grouping the sample using broader characteristics than the full financial year sample, notably excluding State and territory from the calibration. This means that State and territory estimates are not available on a quarterly basis.

The LFS estimates used in benchmarking the quarterly estimates were taken from the May 2024 LFS.

Comparability with LFS

Due to differences in the scope and sample size of this MPHS and that of the monthly LFS, the estimates may differ slightly between labour force estimates from this survey and those from the monthly LFS.

Survey output

This release is published on a quarterly basis, with quarterly data published for the September, December and

March quarters, and a combined June quarter and annual financial year release.

A number of spreadsheets are available from [Data downloads \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/latest-release#data-downloads\)](#). They present tables of estimates and their corresponding relative standard errors (RSEs).

For users who wish to undertake more detailed analysis, the underlying microdata is available in [DataLab \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/datalab\)](#) and from the [TableBuilder \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/tablebuilder\)](#) file. For more details, refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](#).

Survey content

The survey is designed to provide a large range of statistics on labour market dynamics across the following conceptual groups:

- Geography
- Demographics
- Cultural diversity
- Families and Children
- Education and Qualifications
- Health and Disability
- Unpaid work and care
- Participation and Underemployment
- Characteristics of employment
- Characteristics of main and last job
- Income and Housing
- Partner's participation and income
- Wanting to work or more hours
- Available for work or more hours
- Looking for work or more hours
- Difficulties finding work
- Barriers to participation
- Incentives to work

For more details, refer to the Data item list.

Data item list

[Download XLSX](#)
[834.75 KB]

Conceptual framework

To understand potential barriers to increased participation in the labour force, there are three groups who are of particular interest:

- unemployed.
- persons not in the labour force.
- employed persons who usually worked less than 35 hours.

These groups can be further broken down into:

- those who wanted a paid job or would prefer to work more hours.
- those who were available (either in the previous week or within four weeks) to start a job or work more hours.
- those who were looking (actively or passively) for a paid job or more hours.

This conceptual framework is represented diagrammatically in the [2018-19 issue of Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2018-19#conceptual-framework\)](#).

In 2020-21, the conceptual framework was revised to include the concept of job attachment, where there is a group of people who are not classified as employed but have a job that they about to start or can return to when available. This is consistent with the approach used in [Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/latest-release\)](#).

In general, people who have a job to start or return to are excluded from populations of interest:

- The unemployed population of interest is now "Unemployed looking for work" where people who had already obtained a job and are waiting to start are excluded from the population (also known as future starters).
- The persons not in the labour force population of interest now excludes people who had a job to start or return to. This includes people who had obtained a job and were waiting to start, and also people who were away from work without pay for four weeks or longer and were not classified as employed or unemployed.

It is also worth noting that in cases where people who were reported as "permanently unable to work" in the LFS, but later indicated that they wanted a paid job during the personal interview of the MPHS, that these people are classified as potential supply in the population "PNILF who wanted a paid job." People who were permanently unable to work and who did not want a paid job are not classified as potential supply and are usually excluded from estimates (unless otherwise stated).

Another group that is usually excluded from estimates are those who are "permanently retired." From March 2023, this group is defined as anyone who is not in the labour force, did not want a paid job, and responded that they were "Permanently retired, will not work full-time again" when asked for "all reasons for not wanting to work". Prior to March 2023, only those who responded with that reason as their "main reason for not wanting to work" were defined as "permanently retired." This change in definition has been backcast to 2014-15.

What is a barrier?

Barriers are any conditions or characteristics that may make employment difficult. When out of work, barriers can make finding work difficult, and when employed, barriers can hinder the ability to increase participation by working more hours. Some examples of barriers to labour force participation include:

- Caring for children.
- Caring for people who were ill, with disability or were elderly
- Long-term health conditions, disability or old age.
- Low levels of education, training or experience.
- Cultural background or language difficulties.

It is not necessary to want to work in order to be affected by a barrier to participation, as barriers can prevent or discourage people from wanting to work. It should also be noted that barriers can exist regardless of economic conditions, but may make some more or less challenging.

The ABS identifies certain barriers to participation by collating the different reasons why people are not working or

not working more hours. These are based on the following questions asked in the survey:

- Reasons why not wanting to work or work more hours.
- Reasons why not available to work or work more hours.
- Reasons why not looking for work or more hours.
- Difficulties finding work or more hours.
- Reasons why left or lost last job.

For example, when 'Caring for children' is reported as a barrier to participation, it could be because caring for children was given as a reason for not wanting to work, or as a reason why not available for work, or as a reason why not looking for work. All these responses are collated together to provide estimates for all of the people that are affected by this barrier.

Using this approach, the results of the survey can be grouped to arrange the barriers thematically, around people's common responses and shared experience, rather than the specific questions and the answers to those questions.

Furthermore, each question asked in the survey acts like a gateway to the next question. If someone responds that they do not want to work, they do not get asked questions about looking for work or difficulties finding work. Respondents are only asked questions that are relevant to them, so they aren't able to identify with barriers that are exclusive to questions later in the survey that are not relevant to them. For example, only people who are available and looking for work can identify "No jobs in locality, line of work or problems with access to transport" as a barrier. People who do not want to work are not asked about this barrier, even though it might be a factor in their response to not wanting to work. This tailoring of questions means that information on some barriers is limited to particular groups of people, based on their participation in the labour market, rather than covering the entire population.

Data quality

Reliability of estimates

As the estimates are based on information obtained from occupants of a sample of households, they are subject to sampling variability. That is, they may differ from those estimates that would have been produced if all households had been included in the survey or a different sample was selected. Two types of error are possible in an estimate based on a sample survey - sampling error and non-sampling error.

- sampling error is the difference between the published estimate and the value that would have been produced if all dwellings had been included in the survey.
- non-sampling errors are inaccuracies that occur because of imperfections in reporting by respondents and interviewers, and errors made in coding and processing data. These inaccuracies may occur in any enumeration, whether it be a full count or a sample. Every effort is made to reduce the non-sampling error to a minimum by careful design of questionnaires, intensive training and effective processing procedures.

Some of the estimates contained in the tables have a relative standard error (RSE) of 50 per cent or greater. These estimates are marked as unreliable for general use. Estimates with an RSE of between 25 and 50 per cent are also marked and should be used with caution.

The ABS advises caution when interpreting quarterly estimates from Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation survey as the survey sample was originally designed to produce high quality annual output. From January 2023, the ABS has increased the sample and estimates for March quarter 2023 onwards are on the increased sample.

[More on reliability of estimates](#)



Non-sampling error

Non-sampling error may occur in any collection, whether it is based on a sample or a full count such as a census. Sources of non-sampling error include non-response, errors in reporting by respondents or recording of answers by interviewers and errors in coding and processing data. Every effort is made to reduce non-sampling error by careful design and testing of questionnaires, training and supervision of interviewers, and extensive editing and quality control procedures at all stages of data processing.

Sampling error

Sampling error is the difference between the published estimates, derived from a sample of persons, and the value that would have been produced if the total population (as defined by the scope of the survey) had been included in the survey. One measure of the sampling error is given by the standard error (SE), which indicates the extent to which an estimate might have varied by chance because only a sample of persons was included. There are about two chances in three (67%) that a sample estimate will differ by less than one SE from the number that would have been obtained if all households had been surveyed, and about 19 chances in 20 (95%) that the difference will be less than two SEs.

Another measure of the likely difference is the relative standard error (RSE), which is obtained by expressing the SE as a percentage of the estimate.

$$RSE\% = \left(\frac{SE}{estimate} \right) \times 100$$

RSEs for estimates have been calculated using the Jackknife method of variance estimation. This involves the calculation of 30 'replicate' estimates based on 30 different sub-samples of the obtained sample. The variability of estimates obtained from these subsamples is used to estimate the sample variability surrounding the main estimate. RSEs for median estimates have been calculated using the Woodruff method.

The Excel spreadsheets in the Data downloads section contain all the tables produced for this release and the calculated RSEs for each of the estimates.

Only estimates (numbers or percentages) with RSEs less than 25% are considered sufficiently reliable for most analytical purposes. However, estimates with larger RSEs have been included. Estimates with an RSE in the range 25% to 50% should be used with caution while estimates with RSEs greater than 50% are considered too unreliable for general use. All cells in the Excel spreadsheets with RSEs greater than 25% contain a comment indicating the size of the RSE. These cells can be identified by a red indicator in the corner of the cell. The comment appears when the mouse pointer hovers over the cell.

Another measure is the Margin of Error (MOE), which shows the largest possible difference that could be between the estimate due to sampling error and what would have been produced had all persons been included in the survey with a given level of confidence. It is useful for understanding and comparing the accuracy of proportion estimates.

Where provided, MOEs for estimates are calculated at the 95% confidence level. At this level, there are 19 chances in 20 that the estimate will differ from the population value by less than the provided MOE. The 95% MOE is obtained by multiplying the SE by 1.96.

$$MOE = SE \times 1.96$$

Calculation of standard error

Standard errors can be calculated using the estimates (counts or percentages) and the corresponding RSEs. Since the RSE is obtained by expressing the standard error as a percentage of the estimate, recalculating the standard error is obtained by multiplying the estimate by the RSE.

Proportions and percentages

Proportions and percentages formed from the ratio of two estimates are also subject to sampling errors. The size of the error depends on the accuracy of both the numerator and the denominator. A formula to approximate the RSE of a proportion is given below. This formula is only valid when x is a subset of y.

$$RSE\left(\frac{x}{y}\right) \approx \sqrt{[RSE(x)]^2 - [RSE(y)]^2}$$

Differences

The difference between two survey estimates (counts or percentages) can also be calculated from published estimates. Such an estimate is also subject to sampling error. The sampling error of the difference between two estimates depends on their SEs and the relationship (correlation) between them. An approximate SE of the difference between two estimates (x-y) may be calculated by the following formula:

$$SE(x - y) \approx \sqrt{[SE(x)]^2 + [SE(y)]^2}$$

While this formula will only be exact for differences between separate and uncorrelated characteristics or sub populations, it provides a good approximation for the differences likely to be of interest in this publication.

Significance testing

A statistical significance test for a comparison between estimates can be performed to determine whether it is likely that there is a difference between the corresponding population characteristics. The SE of the difference between two corresponding estimates (x and y) can be calculated using the formula shown above in the Differences section. This SE is then used to calculate the following test statistic:

$$\left(\frac{x-y}{SE(x-y)} \right)$$

If the value of this test statistic is greater than 1.96 then there is evidence, with a 95% level of confidence, of a statistically significant difference in the two populations with respect to that characteristic. Otherwise, it cannot be stated with confidence that there is a real difference between the populations with respect to that characteristic.

Rounding

As estimates have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals.

Glossary

Show all



Actively looking for work

Actively looking for work includes:

- written, telephoned or applied to an employer for work.
- had an interview with an employer for work.
- answered an advertisement for a job.
- checked or registered with an employment agency.
- taken steps to purchase or start your own business.
- advertised or tendered for work.
- contacted friends or relatives in order to obtain work.

Available to start work

Refers to people who were available to start work or more hours either in the reference week, or in the four weeks subsequent to the interview.

Areas of socio-economic disadvantage

People who live in areas ranked in the first and second decile (lowest) of the [SEIFA index of relative socio-economic disadvantage \(/statistics/people/people-and-communities/socio-economic-indexes-areas-seifa-australia/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/socio-economic-indexes-areas-seifa-australia/latest-release) (using the national ranking at the SA1 regional level).

Available to start work with more hours

Employed people who usually worked 0–34 hours per week in all jobs and were available to start work with more hours in the reference week or in the four weeks subsequent to the interview.

Barrier to participation

Barriers are any conditions or characteristics that may make employment difficult. When out of work, barriers can make finding work difficult, and when employed, barriers can hinder the ability to increase participation by working more hours. Barriers to participation are identified by collating all of the different reasons why people are not working or not working more hours, based on the following:

- Reasons why not wanting to work or work more hours.
- Reasons why not available to work or work more hours.
- Reasons why not looking for work or more hours.
- Difficulties finding work or more hours.
- Reasons why left or lost last job.

For example, when 'Caring for children' is reported as a barrier to participation, it could be because caring for children was given as a reason for not wanting to work, or as a reason why not available for work, or as a reason why not looking for work. All these responses are collated together to provide estimates for all of the people that are affected by this barrier.

Born overseas

People who were born overseas.

Caring for children affected participation

People who responded that caring for children was a barrier to participation.

Caring for ill, disabled or elderly affected participation

People who responded that caring for ill, disabled or elderly was a barrier to participation.

Currently studying

People who were undertaking study for a trade certificate, diploma, degree or any other educational qualification at the time of the survey.

Cultural background, language difficulties or visa requirements affected participation

People who responded that their cultural background, language difficulties or visa requirements were a barrier to participation.

Did not prefer to work more hours

People who said 'no' or 'don't know' when asked 'would you prefer to work more hours than you usually work?'.

Did not want a paid job

People who were not classified as employed or unemployed who answered 'no' or 'don't know' when asked if they would like a paid job.

Disability

People with disability are those who reported that they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities. This includes:

- loss of sight (not corrected by glasses or contact lenses).
- loss of hearing where communication is restricted, or an aid to assist with, or substitute for, hearing is used.
- speech difficulties.
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties causing restriction.
- chronic or recurrent pain or discomfort causing restriction.
- blackouts, seizures, or loss of consciousness.
- difficulty learning or understanding.
- incomplete use of arms or fingers.
- difficulty gripping or holding things.
- incomplete use of feet or legs.
- nervous or emotional condition causing restriction.
- restriction in physical activities or in doing physical work.
- physical impairment for which aids, help or supervision is required.
- mental health condition requiring help or supervision.
- memory problems or periods of confusion causing restriction.
- social or behavioural difficulties causing restriction.
- long-term effects of head injury, stroke or other acquired brain injury causing restriction.
- receiving treatment or medication for any other long-term conditions or ailments and still being restricted.
- any other long-term conditions resulting in a restriction.

The Short Disability Module questions (and especially the first three questions) in the MPHS are not designed to estimate prevalence but rather allow for the broad comparison of the characteristics of people with and without disability. This is because the MPHS uses a subset of 3 questions from the Short Disability Module (SDM) to determine if a person has disability. The [Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/2018\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/2018) includes over 160 questions and therefore applies further criteria to determine if a person has disability.

People can have both long-term health conditions and disabilities. For people with long-term health conditions, about 50% also have disability. For people with disability, about 90% also have long-term health conditions. This survey does not establish if there is a relationship between a person's long-term health conditions and their disability.

Duration of current main job/last job

Length of time worked in current main job or last job if not employed.

Employed persons

All people aged 15 years and over who, during the reference week:

- worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind, in a job or business or on a farm (comprising employees, employers and own account workers).

- worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm (i.e. contributing family workers).
- were employees who had a job but were not at work and were:
 - away from work for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week.
 - away from work for more than four weeks up to the end of the reference week and received pay for some or all of the four week period. to the end of the reference week.
 - away from work as a standard work or shift arrangement.
 - on strike or locked out.
 - on workers' compensation and expected to return to their job.
- were owner managers who had a job, business or farm, but were not at work.

Employees

An employed person who does not operate their own incorporated or unincorporated enterprise. An employee works for a public or private employer and receives remuneration in wages, salary, on a commission basis with a retainer, tips, piece-rates, or payment in kind.

Employees with paid leave entitlements

Employees who were entitled to either paid sick leave or paid holiday leave (or both).

Employees without paid leave entitlements

Employees who were not entitled to, or did not know whether they were entitled to, paid sick and paid holiday leave.

Family

Two or more people, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering; and who are usually resident in the same household. The basis of a family is formed by identifying the presence of a couple relationship, lone parent-child relationship or other blood relationship. Some households will, therefore, contain more than one family.

Full-time workers (usual)

Employed people who usually work 35 hours or more a week in all jobs.

Future starters

People who were not employed during the reference week, were waiting to start a job within four weeks from the end of the reference week, and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then.

Greater Capital Cities

People who usually resided in the Greater Capital City regions of each State and Territory (ASGS 2016).

Had a job to start or return to

People who were waiting to start a job already obtained. Also includes people who had a job but, up to the end of the reference week, had been away from work without pay for four weeks or longer and had not been actively looking for work.

Had previously worked

People who are not in the labour force or are unemployed and have previously worked in the last 20 years.

High levels of education or experience

People who had a Bachelor degree or higher, or last worked in a Skill level 1 occupation. This group of people is derived using either educational attainment or employment history, depending on which skill level is greater.

Illness, injury or disability affected participation

People who responded that a short-term illness, injury, long-term health condition or disability was a barrier to participation.

Industry

An industry is a group of businesses or organisations that undertake similar economic activities to produce goods and/or services. In this publication, industry refers to ANZSIC Division as classified according to the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification \(ANZSIC\), 2006 \(Revision 2.0\) \(cat. no. 1292.0\) \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1292.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1292.0).

Labour force

The civilian population can be split into two mutually exclusive groups: the labour force (employed and unemployed people) and not in the labour force.

Last job

Refers to the last job worked within the last 20 years.

Level of highest non-school qualification

A person's level of highest non-school qualification is the highest qualification a person has attained in any area of formal study other than school study. It is categorised according to the [Australian Standard Classification of Education \(ASCED\), 2001 \(cat. no. 1272.0\) \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1272.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1272.0) Level of education classification.

Looking for work with more hours

Looked for work with more hours at some time during the four weeks up to the end of the reference week.

Lone parents of children aged 0 - 14 years

Lone parents or guardians of children aged 14 years and under.

Long-term health conditions

People with long-term health conditions are anyone who reported one or more of the following conditions:

- Arthritis or osteoporosis.
- Asthma.
- Cancer.
- Diabetes.
- Heart disease.
- Mental health condition.
- Long-term injury.
- Other long-term condition.

People can have both long-term health conditions and disabilities. For people with long-term health conditions, about 50% also have disability. For people with disability, about 90% also have long-term health conditions. This survey does not establish if there is a relationship between a person's long-term health conditions and their disability.

Long-term out of work

People who had last worked 12 months or more ago, includes both unemployed people and people not in the labour force.

Low levels of education and experience

People who had no non-school qualification or a qualification no higher than Certificate Level II, and who last worked in a Skill Level 5 occupation, had never worked before or last worked 20 years or more ago. This group of people is derived using a combination of educational attainment and employment history.

Main English-speaking countries (MESC)

People who were born in Canada, Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States of America.

Main job

The job in which most hours were usually worked.

No jobs in locality, line of work, or problems with access to transport

People who responded that problems with access to transport or lack of jobs in locality or line of work was a barrier to participation.

No need to work, satisfied with current arrangements, or retired from full-time work (for now)

People who responded that they were satisfied with their current working arrangements and hours, had no need to work, or were retired from full-time work (for now) when asked why they were not participating or looking for more hours.

Not employed

People who are either unemployed or not in the labour force.

Occupation

An occupation is a collection of jobs that are sufficiently similar in their title and tasks, skill level and skill specialisation which are grouped together for the purposes of classification. In this publication, occupation refers to Major Group and Sub-Major Group as defined by [ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 2013, Version 1.2 \(cat. no. 1220.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/4AF138F6DB4FFD4BCA2571E200096BAD?opendocument). (<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/4AF138F6DB4FFD4BCA2571E200096BAD?opendocument>)

Owner managers of incorporated enterprises (OMIEs)

People who work in their own incorporated enterprise, that is, a business entity which is registered as a separate legal entity to its members or owners (also known as a limited liability company). These people are sometimes classified as employees. They can work alone or in a business with employees.

Owner managers of unincorporated enterprises (OMUEs)

People who operate their own unincorporated enterprise, that is, a business entity in which the owner and the business are legally inseparable, so that the owner is liable for any business debts that are incurred. Includes those engaged independently in a trade or profession. They can work alone or in a business with employees.

Parents of children aged 0 - 14 years

Parents or guardians of children aged 14 years and under, from opposite or same sex couples and lone parent families.

Parents of children aged 0 - 5 years

Parents or guardians of children aged 5 years and under, from opposite or same sex couples and lone parent families.

Part-time workers (usual)

Employed people who usually work less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs).

Part-time casual workers

Employees without paid leave entitlements who usually work less than 35 hours a week.

People in the labour force

People who were classified as being in the labour force, that is, either employed or unemployed.

People not in the labour force

People who were not classified as employed or unemployed.

People on any government pension or allowance

People whose income includes any government pension or allowance. Includes pensions and allowances provided through Centrelink, the Department of Veteran Affairs, or any other government pension or allowance.

People on JobSeeker or Newstart Allowance

People who received the [JobSeeker payment \(https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/jobseeker-payment\)](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/jobseeker-payment) or Newstart Allowance. From 20 March 2020, the [JobSeeker payment replaced the Newstart Allowance \(https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/newstart-allowance\)](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/newstart-allowance), so estimates for periods prior to 2020-21 are in reference to the Newstart Allowance, and estimates from 2020-21 onwards are in reference to the JobSeeker payment.

People without children aged 0 - 14 years

People who do not have children aged 0 - 14 years These people may have children 15 years or older, or may reside in households with children aged 0 - 14 years, but are not the parents or guardians of these children.

This measure only considers children who reside in the same household of usual residence, and excludes people whose relationship in household could not be determined.

Preferred to work more hours

Employed people who usually work less than 35 hours a week and would prefer to work more hours than they usually work.

Pregnancy or caring for child aged under 2 years affected participation

People who responded that pregnancy, maternity or paternity leave or caring for a child aged under 2 years was a barrier to participation.

Recent migrants

People who were born overseas and arrived in Australia less than 5 years ago.

Reference week

The week preceding the week in which the interview was conducted.

Regional areas (Rest of state)

People who usually resided outside of the Greater capital city regions of each State and Territory (ASGS 2016).

Relationship in household

The relationship of people who live in the same household.

Retired

A person is classified as 'retired' in the Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation survey using a simplified definition that is based on a people who are not in the labour force, did not want a paid job and when asked for all reasons for not wanting to work, chose "Permanently retired, will not work full-time again" as one of the reasons.

This differs from the more complete definition of retired used in the [Retirement and Retirement Intentions \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/retirement-and-retirement-intentions-australia/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/retirement-and-retirement-intentions-australia/latest-release) survey, which is based on a series of questions that defines the retired population as "People who had previously worked and had retired from work or looking for work, and did not intend to look for, or take up, work in the future."

Status of employment

Classifies employed persons according to the following categories on the basis of their current job:

- Employees.
 - with paid leave entitlements.
 - without paid leave entitlements.
- Owner managers with employees (employer).
 - Owner manager of incorporated enterprise with employees.
 - Owner manager of unincorporated enterprise with employees.
- Owner managers without employees (own account worker).
 - Owner manager of incorporated enterprise without employees.
 - Owner manager of unincorporated enterprise without employees.
- Contributing family workers.

Studying or training affected participation

People who responded that studying or training was a barrier to participation.

Time since last job

The elapsed time since ceasing last job.

Unemployed

People who were not employed during the reference week, and:

- had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and;
- were available for work in the reference week; or
- were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then.

Unable to work

People who responded (or whose response had been recorded by proxy from the responsible adult responding on behalf of the household) that they were "permanently unable to work" when answering the LFS question "Did you do any work at all in a job, business or farm (last week)?"

People who had been classified as "permanently unable to work" from the LFS questionnaire can be randomly selected for personal interview in the B&I survey, and were given the opportunity to respond to the question "Would you like a paid job?" Those who respond that they would like a paid job were included in the population "PNILF who

wanted a paid job."

Unpaid activities

Includes caring for own children or other people's children, including grandchildren. Also includes caring for the elderly or someone with a long-term illness or disability, or undertaking unpaid voluntary work. Respondents were asked whether they had undertaken any of these activities in the last four weeks.

Unpaid carers

People who are either 'Unpaid carers of children aged 0-12 years' or 'Unpaid carers for ill, disabled or elderly' (or both).

Unpaid carers for ill, disabled or elderly

People who responded that caring for ill, disabled or elderly person was a barrier to participation and all people who cared for ill, disabled or elderly person in the last four weeks (unpaid work).

Unpaid carers for children aged 0 - 12 years

People who responded that caring for children was a barrier to participation and all people who cared for children in the last four weeks (unpaid work).

Usual number of hours

Usual hours of work refers to a typical period rather than the hours worked in a specified reference period. The concept of usual hours applies both to people at work and to people temporarily absent from work, and is defined as the hours worked during a typical week or day. Actual hours worked (for a specific reference period) may differ from usual hours worked due to illness, vacation, strike, overtime work, a change of job, or similar reasons. It is possible for a person to usually not work any hours in a typical week (usually work 0 hours) but be classified as employed based on the hours worked during the specific reference period.

Wanted a paid job

People who are not in the labour force and would like a paid job of any kind. Includes people who answered 'Maybe/it depends'.

Wanted more hours

See 'Preferred to work more hours'.

Related publications

ABS publications which may be of interest include:

- [Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia\)](#). (6226.0), 2015-2024.
 - [Potential workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release\)](#) (6228.0).
 - [Underemployed workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/latest-release\)](#) (6229.0).
- [Disability, Ageing and Carers \(/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings\)](#) (4430.0), 1981-2018.
- [Pregnancy and Employment Transitions \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=4913.0&viewtitle=Pregnancy%20and%20Employment%20Transitions.%20Australia~Nov%202017~Latest~29/06/2018&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=4913.0&issue=N](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=4913.0&viewtitle=Pregnancy%20and%20Employment%20Transitions.%20Australia~Nov%202017~Latest~29/06/2018&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=4913.0&issue=N)

[ov%202017&num=&view=&\). \(4913.0\), 2005-2017.](#)

- [Persons Not In the Labour Force, Underemployed Workers and Job Search Experience \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/BBB46A2E9C441282CA257DF40079A913?OpenDocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/BBB46A2E9C441282CA257DF40079A913?OpenDocument) (6226.0.55.001), 2014.
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- [Australian Social Trends - Disability and Work \(https://archive.org/details/41020-2012-03/page/16/mode/2up\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6265.0&viewtitle=Underemployed%20Workers,%20Australia~September%202013~Latest~26/02/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6265.0&issue=September%202013&num=&view=&). (6265.0), 1985-2013.• <a href=) (4102.0), Mar 2012.
-
- [Occasional Paper: Labour Market Programs, Unemployment and Employment Hazards \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/F1AB3EB6E180B231CA2570AC001AC2BE?OpenDocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/F1AB3EB6E180B231CA2570AC001AC2BE?OpenDocument) (6239.0.00.002), 1997.
- [Focus on Families - A Statistical Series: Education and Employment \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4421.01994?OpenDocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4421.01994?OpenDocument) (4421.0), 1994.
- [Australia's Long-Term Unemployed, A Statistical Profile \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6255.01993?OpenDocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6255.01993?OpenDocument) (6255.0), 1993.

History of changes

December quarter 2024

- Quarterly estimates published for December quarter 2024.
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for the December quarter 2024. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation) for more information.

September quarter 2024

- Quarterly estimates published for September quarter 2024.
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for the September quarter 2024. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation) for more information.

Financial year 2023-24

- Financial year estimates published for 2023-24.
- Estimates rebenchmarked to June 2024 [Labour Force Survey \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2024\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2024). These revisions incorporate the final rebasing of ERP to the results of the 2021 Census.
- An issue was detected in the 2023-24 collection which resulted in incomplete incentives data for people who did not want to work. This issue only relates to 2023-24 data and does not affect other data for this population group or data for other groups. For the Financial year 2023-24, this issue has been addressed using imputation based on 2022-23 data.
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for the June quarter 2024. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation) for more

March quarter 2024

- Quarterly estimates published for March quarter 2024.
- Estimates rebenchmarked to May 2024 [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2024\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2024). These revisions incorporate the final rebasing of ERP to the results of the 2021 Census.
- An issue was detected in the 2023-24 collection which resulted in incomplete incentives data for people who did not want to work. This issue only relates to 2023-24 data and does not affect other data for this population group or data for other groups. For the March quarter 2024, this issue has been addressed using imputation based on March quarter 2023 data. The ABS will review this imputation approach when March quarter 2025 data becomes available.
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for the March quarter 2024. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation) for more information.

December quarter 2023

- Quarterly estimates published for December quarter 2023.
- Financial year Table 12 estimates rebenchmarked to November 2023 [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/nov-2023\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/nov-2023). These revisions incorporate the final rebasing of ERP to the results of the 2021 Census.
- An issue was detected in the 2023-24 collection which resulted in incomplete incentives data for people who did not want to work. This issue only relates to 2023-24 data and does not affect other data for this population group or data for other groups. For the December quarter 2023, this issue has been addressed using imputation based on December quarter 2022 data. The ABS will review this imputation approach when December quarter 2024 data becomes available.
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for the December quarter 2023. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation) for more information.

September quarter 2023

- Quarterly estimates published for September quarter 2023.
- An issue was detected in the 2023-24 collection which resulted in incomplete incentives data for people who did not want to work. This issue only relates to 2023-24 data and does not affect other data for this population group or data for other groups. For the September quarter 2023, this issue has been addressed using imputation based on September quarter 2022 data. The ABS will review this imputation approach when September quarter 2024 data becomes available.

- Estimates rebenchmarked to November 2023 [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/nov-2023\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/nov-2023) (both financial year and quarterly estimates). These revisions incorporate the final rebasing of ERP to the results of the 2021 Census.
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for the September quarter 2023. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation) for more information.
- Tables have been updated to include the option to select Main reason or All reasons where applicable (for example, 'main reason not looking for work' or 'all reasons not looking for work').
- Previously missing family relationship items 'Family composition of household', 'Social marital status' and 'Relationship in household' were re-instated for the 2014-15 and 2016-17 financial years.
- New populations of interest were added: 'People without children aged 0 - 14 years', 'People on any government pension or allowance', 'Areas of socio-economic disadvantage', and 'Part-time casual workers'.
- References to the outdated term 'sickness' have been replaced with 'short-term illness' or 'long-term health condition'.

Financial year 2022-23

- Financial year estimates published for 2022-23.
- Estimates rebenchmarked to August 2023 [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/aug-2023\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/aug-2023).
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for the 2022-23 financial year and June quarter 2023. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation) for more information.
- Previously missing education and qualifications items were re-instated for the 2014-15 financial year.

June quarter 2023

- Quarterly estimates published for June quarter 2023.
- First release of data for 'People with disability'. Whether a person has disability has been derived from a subset of questions from the ABS Short Disability Module. These questions are not designed to estimate prevalence but rather allow for the broad comparison of the characteristics of people with and without disability. For more information, refer to the [Glossary \(/methodologies/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia-methodology/2020-21#glossary\)](/methodologies/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia-methodology/2020-21#glossary).
- Quarterly estimates rebenchmarked to August 2023 Labour Force Survey estimates.
- Updates to the financial year tables and microdata in DataLab are scheduled for 27 November 2023.

March quarter 2023

- Quarterly estimates published for March quarter 2023.
- Revisions to estimates from 2014-15 onwards:
 - Rebenchmarking to April 2023 Labour Force Survey estimates.
 - Manual recoding of the text provided as "other reasons" for the items related to "Reasons not looking for work or more hours" and "Difficulties finding work or more hours."
 - Scope of "permanently retired" expanded to include all people not in the labour force who did not want a paid job and who provided the reason "Permanently retired, will not work full-time again" when asked why they did not want to work. Previously, only those who provided that reason as the main reason were defined as permanently retired.
- New financial year tables in [Data downloads \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2020-21#data-downloads\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2020-21#data-downloads), which contain the latest revised estimates and better consistency with the Quarterly measures tables. These new tables also include 'Populations of interest' in more tables, such as 'People with a long-term health condition.'

- Minor changes to the Quarterly measures tables to improve consistency between the tables by using the same population scope - People aged 18-75 years, excluding:
 - permanently retired (new definition, as mentioned above),
 - permanently unable to work (who did not want a paid job), and
 - people who had a job to start or return to.
- Table Q2 now has additional summary details related to caring for children and other barriers to participation.
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include the revised estimates and the new data for reference period March quarter 2023. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](#) for more information.

December quarter 2022

- Quarterly estimates published for the first time, from September quarter 2014 to December quarter 2022.
- New Tables Q1 to Q7 in [Data downloads \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2020-21#data-downloads\)](#) with summary tables of quarterly measures.
- Estimates were benchmarked to a 3-month average of population estimates from the [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/jan-2023\)](#) (as at January 2023).
- Microdata in DataLab was updated to include new quarterly weights and new data for reference periods September quarter 2022 and December quarter 2022. Refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](#) for more information.

Financial year 2020-21

- Improvements have been made to the way data is presented. Adjustments were made to the [conceptual framework \(/methodologies/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia-methodology/2020-21#conceptual-framework\)](#) to include a separate category for people who had a job to start or return to, which is consistent with the approach used in [Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/latest-release\)](#). Data have been revised back to 2014-15 to incorporate these changes.
- The Excel spreadsheets in [Data downloads \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2020-21#data-downloads\)](#) have been redesigned to incorporate timeseries data back to 2014-15, with optional state and territory breakdowns.
- Estimates were rebenchmarked to a 12-month average of population estimates from the [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2020\)](#) (as at May 2020).
- Microdata has been released in DataLab for the first time, refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation\)](#) for more information.

Show all



2018-19

- Estimates were benchmarked to a 12 month average of population estimates from the Labour Force Survey (as at December 2019). Estimates from previous surveys were also re-benchmarked using 12 month averages from the same LFS population series (as at December 2019) to improve coherence and consistency in the timeseries.

2016-17

- Enhancements were made to the Previous job module, a new question asking "Did you have employees in the business" was added.

2014-15

- Questions on Previous full-time job details and Main source of current personal income were excluded from the 2014–15 survey.
- Enhancements were made to the Previous job payment arrangements question, adding the response category of 'Unpaid trainee/work placement'. Enhancements were also made to survey questions on why not looking for work or more hours, trouble finding work or more hours and wanting more hours. The response categories of 'No need/satisfied with current arrangements/retired (for now)' and 'Visa requirements' were added to these questions.

2012-13

- Part-time workers in scope for the survey were increased to include all part-time workers who usually worked less than 35 hours. In prior surveys, part-time workers in scope for the survey were restricted to only those who usually worked 15 hours or less.